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ABSTRACT

This paper envisions child care problems in the year 2000 and explores their relationship to policies of today. The population entering parenting age in the year 2000 will bear the scars of the inadequate child care policies of the 1980's. New poor and black parents--many of them born to adolescent mothers in the early 1980's--will have been affected by the lack of supportive child care policies, and particularly by results of the 1981 budget cuts. Many of these poor parents, as children, will have had extremely different preschool experiences as compared to the 53 percent of children from middle- and upper-income families who were enrolled in preschool in 1984. Many new parents will have grown up in single parent families headed by their mothers. Their mothers were among those least likely to be beneficiaries of private sector child provisions. By 2000 there will be a 15.6 percent increase in the number of children under 6 years of age, increasing numbers of whom will live in poverty. Certainly, by the year 2000 the use of informal child care arrangements should decline. The decrease in family size will result in families which can better afford formal care in homes or centers. But, increasing numbers of dependent elderly adults will be competing with young children for resources. Issues involving the future of child care services are difficult and will require complex negotiating and painful trade-offs. But the picture is not entirely bleak. Now is a time of tremendous potential for building a child care system that will ensure a positive early education experience for all children. (RH)

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CHILD CARE IN THE YEAR 2000

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Will the traditional American value system which has thus far seen child care as a parental responsibility shift enough to allow for the building of a child care system that is responsive to the rapidly changing demographics? Will we ever come close to accepting the principles underlying the development of Sweden's comprehensive child care system which includes:

- The right of both men and women to work.
- The equality of sexes.
- The possibility of both parents to devote time to their children.

Even if our values take a turn in a new direction and every child and family is guaranteed the right to a supportive and safe child care experience in the year 2000, there is another serious issue intimately linked to early childhood that we as a society will face as a nation in the year 2000. The parents of many of our pre-school children will bear the scars of the child care policies of the 1980's which have resulted in relatively bleak early childhood experiences for a large percentage of this population entering parenting age in the year 2000.

A large segment of the new parents will have been affected by the lack of supportive child care policies. Currently more than one-fifth of all children live in households with incomes below the poverty level, while 40.7 percent of all black families with children live below the poverty level.

It is important to remember that these same parents and their own parents suffered the effects of cutbacks in health services, loss of income supports, and the ultimate stress that results from living at a bare minimum level of subsistence.

In child care specifically the results of 1981 cuts are grim. Thirty-three states served less children in 1983 than 1981. What does this mean to the quality of the early lives of the children who lost care? West Virginia is not an atypical state--739 families lost care. A survey revealed that at least 391 children had been shifted from familiar child care arrangements forced to leave their familiar caregivers and friends while 79 children were caring for themselves. In New York State between 8400 and 12,000 children lost child care. One-sixth of these children are reported to be regularly caring for themselves.

Many of the parents in the year 2000 will be the 600,000 babies who were born to adolescent mothers in 1984. Few will have been fortunate enough to be cared for in child care settings in high schools enabling their mothers to finish their education.

Many parents will have had mothers who remained dependent on AFDC because of the limited child care supports available to mothers in school or training programs.

These parent will all have had extremely different pre-school experiences from the 53 percent of children from middle and upper-income families who were enrolled in pre-school in 1984. Their

own parents were unlikely to take much advantage of the dependent care tax credit, a $2 billion program which is most useful to families with the income to pay for child care in the first place. Many of them grew up in the one-fifth of all families in 1984 headed by single parents, most of them raised by their mothers, are unlikely to earn more than $10,000 a year.

Their mothers were also the least likely beneficiaries of private sector child benefits. In fact, their parents may have worked at a company who could not use their on-site center because it did not offer a sliding scale, so some may have had companies which provided assistance in helping them find child care but were indifferent to the fact that the cost of the care was beyond the lower-income employee's reach. Most of their parents were not able to take advantage of salary reduction plans due to their limited tax liabilities.

We definitely will have a new generation needing child care in the year 2000. Because of the baby boom, there are a large group of young women currently in the child bearing ages who will raise potential mothers. Immigration will also contribute to the growth in the number of children and the need for child care will be heightened by the continued increase in children living in single parent households. By the year 2000 there will be a 15.6 percent increase in the number of children under six. There will be a

sizeable increase in the number of these children living in poverty. If the poverty rate among children under six equals the corresponding rates in 1981, the number of very young children living in poverty will increase by nearly 2 million between 1980 and 1990 an amount for a poverty rate of 25 percent of all children under six.

Clearly, there will be patchwork, some changes in our current child care system.

- o Eighty percent of two parent-families will have both spouses employed.
- o Seventy-five percent of all mothers will be working.

The use of informal child care arrangements should decline in the year 2000.

- o Family day care providers are often women with young children. The recent cohorts of young women are obtaining labor force experience earlier. Such young women will be more likely to continue to work outside the home even after having children.
- o The continued increase in female headed households will affect the demand for center based care as they are more likely to use centers.

The continued decline in family size will also result in smaller families better able to afford more formal care in homes or centers.

- o Increased mobility will enable fewer families to be able to use relatives for child care.
- o Fewer siblings and fewer teen-agers will limit sibling care. Between 1981 and 1995, the number of teen-agers in the population should drop from 27.6 million to 24.4 million.

Before we can speak to the child care system that will be in place in the 1990's, it is important to consider other relevant demographics that could have considerable effect on the resources necessary to build this system. By the year 2000, our elderly population will have increased considerably. The population over 80 is the fastest growing segment of the population. Between 1980 and 1990 alone the total elderly population is expected to grow by 6.3 million with the old-elderly accounting for approximately 2.3 million of the increase. As the share of women, the very old and persons living alone increases, the number of poor elderly will also increase. If the population age 80 and above, that is poor remained relatively stable at about 20 percent, there will be 1.5 million versus 1 million in 1983 who are poor in 1990.

How will this affect child care? These are three ramifications:

- A basic competition for dependent care resources. Currently one in 10 million women between 45 and 65 has responsibility for an elder relative. In 1975, almost 1 million women aged 44 to 58 claimed that the health of a family member limits their work. One out of eight retired women said they were retired because they were needed at home. As more women work, more will want to stay in the labor force and seek outside care for their dependents. The increased elderly will also affect the medicare budget.

- A competition for the agenda of women's organizations, many of whom have an aging membership find the care of their elderly parents a more pressing issue than the care of young children.

- More elderly will continue to vote. Children as always will have to depend on others to represent them in the political sphere.

If we can leverage the resources, what will a system look like? How can the patches be put together to assure accessibility, affordability, quality and flexibility? It is not 1972 and it is unlikely that a single system can be superimposed. What role will the federal government take?

- Will in the year 2000, Iowa still limit eligibility for child care to families earning less than poverty level wages or Texas to those earning less than half the states median income?

- Will Louisiana still have not licensing for child care?

- Will we be able to fill all the gaps in our system by the year 2000? Can se aford increased paternity leave, more infant, pre-school and school-age care?

- What role will the schools play in meeting child care needs? Will child care professionals and advocates and parents demand protection to ensure that child care that develops in the schcols is sensitive to the needs of young children and their families? Will half day pre-school programs and kindergarten programs that end at 3 o'clock create an even younger group of latchkey children?

- If schools serve more four year olds, will Head Start begin to reach one and two year olds and play a stronger role in helping adolescent mothers? Will community based child care programs survive and flourish? How will family day care be affected?

- Will centers be able to leverage the resoures to develop more infant care programs and will family day care providers receive support in caring for younger children?

- Will the federal government help to insure quality child care by providing financial incentives to states which meet model guidelines?

- Will training funds be available to help insure that child care is provided by skilled caregivers? What will CDA look like in the year 2000? Will the federal government continue to support the assessment and credentialing of child care workers or will CDA be phased out because the eliminations of federal support will increase the costs of credentialing beyond the reach of low salaried child care workers?

- Will increased child care in schools move child care salaries up or simply provide new job opportunities for teachers?

- Will the private sector be funding the bulk of Information and Referral programs? How will I&R be funded in areas with no employer interest?

- What will the role of the private sector be in the year 2000? Will they act as a lobbying force for increased public dollars in addition to putting in place more responsive family policies?

The questions are many and we have only touched upon a few. Many of the issues are difficult and will require complex negotiating and painful trade-offs. However, it is also a period of tremendous potential. A time for this country to dig in its heels and for the many desperate interests to join together and build the child care system that will insure a positive early education experience for all our children.